

LIBRARY RESOURCES OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS FOR THE RUSSIAN NATION: PROBLEMS OF COLLECTION BUILDING AND OF ACCESS*

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Abstract: In Russia's recent period of social transformation the importance of public documents of legal significance has sharply increased. Libraries provide a channel through which such documents can be spread to all the people, and made easier of access. However, there is no Russian library which contains all the official documents needed by users. The solution to this problem lies in setting up a shared library resource of official documents, at three levels: the federal, the regional, and the municipal. The Russian State Library, in its role as a national library for Russia, is at the head of the resource-sharing system for public documents, but territorial sharing of responsibilities for collection building and access throughout the nation's library and information system will allow Russia to achieve full availability of public documents of legal significance to all members of Russian society.

How real are the rights and freedoms of a country's citizens? This is a function of the degree of development of a public legal culture, or rule of law, in society. Citizens' access to official documents is an essential component of this public legal culture.

In 1990, following international recommendations (and especially those of IFLA), Russia adopted this definition of an official publication: *a publication brought out on behalf of governmental bodies or institutions or agencies of the state, and containing materials of a normative or directive nature* (GOST 7.60-90). Official documents in Russia, so defined, are a very heterogeneous collection of materials, whether you think in terms of their varied composition and diverse contents, in terms of the number and variety of organisations putting them out, or in terms of their differences of purpose and of use. Furthermore, the vital underlying role of official documents in civil society has plainly been underestimated in the past by the state. As a result, providing for public examination of official documents, or even provision of information about them, has become a major challenge.

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What the citizens of Russia badly lack is access to the sort of legal information which constitutes a rather substantial portion of the country's official documents. Achieving rapid and complete access to legal information of high quality from official documents poses a grave problem, not only because it is vital for the public interest, but because it is remarkably bulky. At a conference of the executive officers of the legal services of Russia's federal organs of government in December 1995, for example, it was noted that in Russia there are at least one and a half million normative acts or regulations in force at the federal or regional levels!

In recent years, within the governmental sphere, collections of Russian official documents have begun to be developed deliberately and systematically. Thus, clause 11 of the federal law of 1994 *On the legal deposit copy of documents* bestows on the Parliamentary Library of Russia the right to receive two free copies of each official document. Furthermore, governmental systems to provide information on legislation are being created. In parallel with this development, a good many electronic full-text databases of normative documents have come into being as a commercial initiative. However, most of these governmental and commercial resources are difficult for the general public to access. State activities in the sphere of government documents collection are geared to the the provision of service to government agencies, and to acquire information from commercial databases would cost the private citizen a pretty penny.

It is the public importance of official documents which causes Russian libraries to go out and acquire them, by purchase or otherwise. For unlike other state agencies our libraries are social institutions, with a mission of serving the individual needs of every citizen who comes to them, and respecting the priority of each person's human rights.

In this context the building of quality library collections of official documents, open to general use by the public, has become urgent. According to a survey we did in 1997 of the research and information activities of national and regional public research libraries within the Russian Federation, every one of these libraries ranks the placing of official documents at the disposal of its readers among its priority tasks.

To that end reading rooms for official publications are being opened, and most libraries are now collaborating closely and successfully with the local executive and legislative authorities, who are both suppliers of official documents and users of the resources of official publications kept in the library. Furthermore, each of the libraries surveyed has acquired one or another of the full-text Russian legal databases, such as Garant, or Kodeks, or Konsultant Plus.

These efforts by individual libraries are important, but nonetheless fragmentary. Almost every library we surveyed, in answering our questionnaire, mentioned its readers' discontent with the state of its official documents service.

How can we solve this public problem of grave importance? The solution would seem to lie in setting up a library and information network for Russia based upon a shared, nation-wide library collection of official documents. In keeping with existing library structures, this new library and information network for official documents provision could be broken down into three levels: the federal, the regional, the municipal. On each level libraries would be assigned responsibility for maintaining a complete collection of all official documents within their jurisdiction, and for granting public access to those documents.

This of course presupposes a lively co-operation of libraries at all levels with the centres for legal information which by mandate of the Russian government are now developing automated legal information networks at both the federal and regional levels.

Within the resource-sharing system, the accumulated collections of official documents at the country's two national libraries, which both receive legal deposits of documents and acquire foreign official documents, will be essential building blocks. These two institutions, the Russian State Library in Moscow and the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, will collect the most complete sets of Russian and foreign official documents, while regional official documents will be collected by the national libraries of the different constituent republics of the Russian Federation, as well as by regional research libraries.

Of course, a whole range of questions must be resolved before a shared, national library collection of official documents can be set up. Central libraries within different regions must be assigned responsibility for the acquisition, preservation and use of official documents according to certain terms of reference. Full bibliographic control of official documents is needed, and, based upon it, the creation of means of registering the availability of official publications to readers, whether through national or regional union catalogues or through publication of bibliographic notices and abstracts.

The first practical steps in the direction of the new resource-sharing system have been taken by the Russian State Library, which sponsored and arranged a conference on organising the official publications work of libraries in Russia. At this conference representatives of the Institute of Legislation and Comparative Law, of the Russian State Duma committee on information policy, of the Parliamentary Library of Russia, of the Library of the Russian Presidential

Administration, and of the research centre for legal information at the Russian Ministry of Justice, all took the floor to speak in favour of the idea of a shared, national library collection of official documents.

Also, this year (1998) the scheme was submitted to the Russian President's Standing Commission on the Systematic Codification of Russian Law, which likewise favoured it.

Now let us take a closer look at the present situation as regards collection building and public access in the field of official documents at the Russian State Library, a leading centre for this work within the Russian library and information system.

The Russian State Library has at its disposal a truly vast collection of official documents; each year it receives another hundred thousand or so of them, both Russian and foreign! The Library acquires official publications from several sources:

- the free legal deposit copy of official publications
- purchase of official literature at auction in the Russian and foreign markets
- subscriptions
- book exchanges
- deposit of materials from the United Nations and its specialised agencies
- copies of missing documents from the Russian Book Chamber or other libraries
- microfilming of publications and their transfer to machine-readable form
- gifts, both from organisations and from private individuals.

The complete and general supply of Russian official documents to the Library through legal deposit provides a favourable basis for the building up of a comprehensive collection of Russian official publications within its walls. Russian official publications are acquired both in the Russian language and in the languages of other peoples within the Federation. The Library also possesses an exhaustive collection of official documents of the republics of the former U.S.S.R. Foreign official documents are acquired more selectively, with national constitutions and the legislation of international organisations being collected most thoroughly. The purchase of official publications is restricted neither as to kind of document nor as to format: monographic publications, periodicals and brief documents in no series are acquired for the collections, in paper formats ranging from book to broadside, in microformat and in electronic media.

It is notorious that there is no uniformity in world library practice as regards the physical organisation of collections of official documents. At the Russian State

Library we have separated out the United Nations documents (which have their own special coding, and occupy about 210,000 shelving units), as well as specialised collections of standards and technical documents; these have their own reading rooms, where readers can obtain a document from the shelves within five to fifteen minutes. Other official publications have been divided among specialised departments of the Library according either to subject content or to format, and are not included in the ambit of the traditional reference tool for users, the library catalogue.

It is the lack of a precise classification scheme for official documents that has led to their being scattered throughout the Library without catalogue access. However, at the same time the heightened public interest in these documents has led to their being given special attention in the central reference collection of the reference and bibliographic department.

There within a few minutes a user of the Library can consult enactments and ordinances of the Russian parliament and government, Russian presidential decrees, documents issued on behalf of the Council of the Federation, collected statutes going back to the Russian Empire, publications of government ministries and agencies, and statistical reference books. Bibliographic specialists aid the readers with advice on the use of official documents and devote a major effort to expounding their contents.

To assist in this work and help users follow the complicated flow of official documents research guidelines and pathfinder leaflets for users of official publications are put out, such as our recent guides to *The State and the law or to the United Nations*, and our new pathfinder *Normative acts of the Russian Federation: bibliographic searching in periodicals and serials*. Also, a *Guide to the official documents holdings of libraries and to holdings of normative legal information* is in press.

Since 1995 the users of the Russian State Library have been able to carry out online searches for legislation and other normative acts in the Garant full-text legal reference database. This documentation comes to Garant directly from 186 agencies of government and administration, including the Presidency, the Government, the Central Bank and the State taxation service. In addition to documents relevant to virtually all branches of federal Russian law and international documents applicable to Russia and to the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Garant database includes normative acts of the Russian regions. It is updated weekly.

Finally, since last year (1997) readers at the Russian State Library have been able to search for and download official documents on the Internet.

Who are these users of our official documents? They cover a very wide spectrum, from students to scholars, from technical specialists to businessmen. But our analysis of the user population tells us that we can serve them most effectively through an open access environment, with a service point where special skills in the handling of official documents are concentrated.

Making official documents available to users only within the general service pattern of the Library has reduced the efficacy of their use. We therefore have concluded that the Russian State Library must set up a specialized department of official documents. A new *Acquisitions policy for official documents at the Russian State Library* has been composed, and we have begun preparations to set up our Hall of Official Publications.

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